# THE
# IMPORTANCE of LEARNING.

# A
# SERMON

Preached before an Aſſembly

OF

## MINISTERS

AT

## *MANCHESTER*

May 21. 1760.

By P. HOLLAND.

Atque idem ego contendo cum ad naturam eximiam atque illuſtrem acceſſerit ratio quædam conformatioque doctrinæ: tum illud neſcio quid præclarum ac ſingulare ſolere exiſtere. *Cicero pro Archia Poeta.*

WARRINGTON

MDCCLX.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

THIS DISCOURSE

THE CHIEF MERIT OF WHICH IS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

AND ITS PECULIAR PROPRIETY

IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED

TO THE REVEREND THE MINISTERS

BEFORE WHOM IT WAS PREACHED

AND AT WHOSE DESIRE

IT IS NOW MADE PUBLIC

BY

THEIR VERY AFFECTIONATE

AND OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT

The Author.

ACTS vii. 32.

AND MOSES WAS LEARNED IN ALL THE WISDOM OF THE EGYPTIANS: AND WAS MIGHTY IN WORDS AND IN DEEDS.

WE have no very clear lights, by which to diſcover, in what the learning of the ancient Egyptians conſiſted; and it is quite unneceſſary on the preſent occaſion to enter into any of the particulars of it, that have been handed down. The whole current of antiquity directs us to this country, as being very early the ſeat of learning and knowledge; and there are inſtances on record of the wiſe men of other nations travelling hither for improvement.

IT ſeems to be mentioned in my text with deſign to do honour to the character of Moſes, that he was learned, or inſtituted, as the word ſignifies, in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians. It is taken notice of plainly, as the foundation of thoſe memorable actions, by which the early part of his life was diſtinguiſh'd; and, I ſee no impropriety in ſuppoſing, that the knowledge he acquired in the ſchools of Egypt, was in part a qualification for the province he afterwards held with ſo much dignity and uſefulneſs, as the lawgiver, governor and leader of the Jewiſh people.

THIS however is certain, that the learning of ancient times at leaſt, was deſign'd to ſerve as a diſcipline

pline for the moſt diſtinguiſh'd ſcenes of civil and ſocial life: and, that ſuch acquiſitions, as the ſchools afforded, were a conſiderable part of the virtuous and manly education of future lawgivers, ſtateſmen, and generals; and of all other perſons, who were expected to be the ſupports and ornaments of the reſpective ſtates, to which they belonged.

And it is found to be true in fact; that thoſe, who have made the moſt diſtinguiſh'd figure in the buſy ſcenes of life, have often had a conſiderable ſhare of thoſe kinds of learning, which were moſt eſteem'd in their day. A ſlender acquaintance with the Grecian and Roman hiſtory will furniſh a perſon with inſtances abundantly ſufficient to confirm this obſervation.

This then, it ſhould ſeem, was the tendency of ancient learning; if that of modern times has had a different tendency; to what ſhall we aſcribe it? human nature is ever the ſame; and the grandeur and good order of civil ſocieties in all ages depend on the ſame or ſimilar cauſes. If what has paſt for learning therefore has ever appear'd to operate differently; it muſt probably be, becauſe it is of a different kind: and the remedy for this is to be ſought, not in the neglect of learning; but in a care to reform the abuſes, which have crept into the ſciences; and to reſtore thoſe branches to their deſerved honour, which have been the fruitful cauſes of ſo much order and happineſs in private and ſocial life.

It has been one very unhappy effect of ſuch a change in the ſtudies and purſuits of the learned, wherever it has taken place, that learning itſelf is fallen into contempt with the buſy and active part of mankind. They have been apt to conſider it, as only fit to fill the heads, and exerciſe the wits of idle people;

ple: but as of no uſe at all to thoſe, who are deſign'd to fill up the more active ſtations, and ſerve their country in the faithful diſcharge of all the offices of peace and war.

Nay learning and knowledge have been repreſented, as not only uſeleſs, but hurtful; as the means of corrupting the native manners of a brave people; as the cauſes of idleneſs and effeminacy; and as acceſſary to the extinction of that noble ardour for public liberty, which is their beſt ſecurity againſt all uſurpation. Religion too has been thought to be in danger from the advancement of learning: and the torrent of infidelity and profaneneſs, which in ſome ages has been likely to bear down every thing great and good, has by ſome been reckon'd to owe its riſe, or at leaſt a conſiderable increaſe to its ſtreams, to the fountains of knowledge too freely laid open, and diffus'd in too general and undiſtinguiſhing a manner.

To judge of the truth and juſtneſs of theſe heavy charges, it will be neceſſary to take a view of the ſeveral kinds of learning; that we may ſee whether they are all equally guilty; or whether whilſt falſe ſcience is of a hurtful or dangerous tendency; the true is not on the contrary innocent, ornamental and uſeful.

It will not be expected on the preſent occaſion, that I ſhould enter into a particular and diſtinct conſideration of each of the objections refer'd to above. For beſides that the limits aſſign'd to this diſcourſe will not admit of ſo extenſive an undertaking: it is eaſy to refer to thoſe who have anſwer'd them effectually; and particularly to an author of the higheſt character, who for ſtrength of genius, and variety of knowledge has had perhaps no ſuperior, and few equals. All that is propoſed here is to take a very general

general view of the chief branches of learning; and briefly to hint at ſome of the advantages which will accrue from a juſt attention to them.

And here Language, which contains the elements of all learning and knowledge comes firſt to be conſider'd. That the knowledge of words is neceſſary to diffuſe ſcience muſt be obvious to every one. But the ſtudy of foreign languages, the living and the dead, employs ſo much of our time, eſpecially in the early part of life, that the conſideration of it is not to be thus paſs'd over. Why ſhould any tongue but our own employ our attention is a queſtion, that has been ſometimes aſk'd; and it is a queſtion, which may be aſk'd with more appearance of reaſon in this than in almoſt any preceding age, even by thoſe who are friends to the ſciences. We have, ſay they, a ſufficient number of good authors on all ſubjects in our own tongue; and our time might be much better employ'd, in making ourſelves maſters of their ſentiments, than in collecting words and phraſes from other tongues; and ſearching with ſo much diligence for that, which will not after all repay the pains, which the ſearch muſt coſt us.

But the ſtudy of languages is not without its uſe. If it be properly purſu'd it ſtrengthens the capacities of the mind, and enlarges our experience; and the compariſon of different languages together, with juſt critical remarks on their general agreement to the nature of things, and the powers of the human mind, and the peculiarities obſervable in each, beſides the entertainment it will afford to a curious obſerver, may prove the means of enriching our native tongue with that copiouſneſs and variety, which will enable us to deliver our ſentiments on all ſubjects with a ſuperior ſtrength and elegance.

And not to inſiſt upon it, that languages are uſually acquired at an age, when nothing elſe almoſt can be learnt; it may be added, if the experience and obſervation of other nations be worth any thing, it is very deſirable, where we cannot collect them for ourſelves, to take them from the words of the original authors.

There was a time, when the ſtudy of the languages was of the utmoſt importance. On the revival of learning, after a period of long and deplorable ignorance, the friends of knowledge and inquiry had no other reſource, than to the valuable remains of the wiſe ancients; and, it is perhaps nothing more than what juſtice will exact, to confeſs, that our ſubſequent improvements are in a great meaſure to be imputed to the diligence, with which their writings were ſtudied; and the zeal employed in extending the knowledge of them.

There appears no preſent danger of our neglecting to acquire the knowledge of modern languages: their importance to the continuance and enlargement of our commerce will ſecure them at leaſt a juſt degree of attention; but neither can the ancient be ſafely neglected; if they are not ſo neceſſary at preſent as an avenue to the ſciences, they will at leaſt conduce to their wider extent and progreſs; and where we can compare together the ſeveral ages and nations, in which they have been neglected or cultivated; we ſhall ſee that not only the ſtate of their learning, but their other civil advantages have ſome dependance on the attention paid to theſe ſtudies.

After all it is readily owned, that the knowledge of words alone can be of little ſignificance; and, if any ſuffer them to ingroſs their whole attention to the neglect of things, their folly and abſurdity will de-

ſerve the ſevereſt cenſure. It is chiefly to gain the beſt acceſs to the ſtores of knowledge, which are preſerved amongſt other nations, and particularly in the writings of ancient authors, that the languages are expected to ingage our attention; and if we don't apply them to this uſe; we might almoſt as well have no acquaintance with them at all.

As then the only or chief uſe of learning any language is, that we may attain a juſt knowledge of things; it will be moſt natural next to conſider the nature and uſes of ſuch knowledge as we are capable of acquiring.

As to the Knowledge of Nature in the confined ſenſe, in which it is often taken for the knowledge of the viſible, material world; our firſt acquaintance with her is owing to the impreſſions made on the ſenſes by external objects. The repreſentation of theſe on the mind is in ſome caſes lively, ſtrong and accurate; and in others weak and confuſed. Some are at the pains to collect and compare the impreſſions, they receive; to obſerve the changes, which the ſeveral bodies around them are capable of, and their different affections and properties with regard to one another; whilſt others never go a ſingle ſtep beyond the particular impreſſion, which the mind receives; and unleſs where the neceſſities of life exact a cloſer attention, are ſcarce capable of recalling any impreſſions, which have formerly been preſent with the mind. Theſe, it is obvious, muſt be quite ſtrangers to the courſe and order of nature; and, if any knowledge of it is to be acquired, it muſt be in the former method.

The great misfortune is, that the conceit and prejudice of mankind will not ſuffer them to conduct their inquiries by the rules, which nature preſcribes.

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When a few obſervations have been made, a theory is immediately eſtabliſhed; and then all the operations of nature are to be explained agreeably to it. The toil of a laborious inveſtigation and ſlow deduction from a variety of experiments will not ſuit the natural rapidity of the greater part of mankind; and, rather than diſcover an excuſable and modeſt ignorance, they will by a precipitate determination prevent all future inquiries and improvements.

TRUE natural knowledge is of a very different kind from any thing men of this ſort have invented, or can poſſibly invent. It conſiſts in ſuch an acquaintance with ſurrounding objects, as will enable us to apply them to the uſe and ornament of human life. And this ſort of knowledge is not to be acquired, but by the obſervation of things as they are, and the frequent repetition of the moſt accurate experiments. This ſcience, as it will draw very conſiderable improvements from the arts already practiſed, makes an ample return for the advantages which it receives. It is from this quarter, that the artiſt is furniſhed with materials, on which to employ his induſtry, and aſſiſted to uſe his labour and ſkill to the greateſt advantage. The ſtudy of nature ſupplies him with patterns of the eaſieſt and beſt method of operation; enables him to do what is ſuperior to his natural ſtrength; and to compaſs what lies within the reach of his abilities in a more eaſy and expeditious manner.

AND can it ever be queſtioned whether reſearches of this kind are innocent and ſafe? will it not be allowed, that they are highly uſeful? for beſides the elegant and agreeable employment they afford at a time of leiſure; the relaxation they give from ſeverer ſtudies; and their effect to extend and improve the powers of the mind: they inlarge, as has been ſhown,

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the ſphere of our activity; and frequently ſupply very powerful motives to that general induſtry, which is moſt friendly to the human conſtitution; and ſpread thro' the ſeveral ſocieties of mankind that decency and good order which are the cauſes of ſo many private and public bleſſings.

It is a further advantage of theſe ſtudies, that by a more exact acquaintance with particular natures, we ſhall be enabled to perceive the connexion of ſome of the greateſt parts of the univerſe; ſo as to convince us of the good deſign, which prevails throughout all nature; and lead to that full perſuaſion of the power, wiſdom and goodneſs of the Supreme Being, which will fit us to celebrate his perfections, and ingage in the other offices of religion with knowledge and underſtanding.

Whilst that kind of philoſophy then, which is built on fine-ſpun theories, is uſeleſs and vain; that which proceeds on experiments, by its connexion with the uſeful and ornamental arts; and by the arguments it ſupplies for the exiſtence and perfections of God; has the moſt agreeable aſpect on the beſt intereſts of mankind.

The different methods, in which Moral Inquiries have been carried on, will in like manner give us occaſion to lament the ill effects of falſe, and repreſent the advantages of true ſcience. The dry and abſtract manner of conſidering moral ſubjects, abounding with needleſs ſubtilties and refinements, has it is acknowledged been too common in the ſchools of learning; and the effects have been ſuch, as might be expected. Thoſe, who have been eſteemed the greateſt maſters in this way, when they have come to ſpeak or write on moral ſubjects for the inſtruction and benefit of the world, have acquitted themſelves ſo poorly; and done

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ſuch little ſervice to the cauſe of virtue with the many definitions and nice diſtinctions, in which they had been inſtructed; that the more ſenſible part of mankind have eaſily deſpiſed their learned and laborious inquiries; and apply'd themſelves to other maſters for the knowledge they required. The natural, undiſguiſed eloquence of thoſe, who have juſt deſcribed the genuine ſentiments of their own hearts; and diſcovered that warm approbation of integrity, compaſſion, and the other virtues, which they naturally raiſe in an honeſt mind, is far more agreeable to a perſon of a good taſte, than more accurate compoſitions of an abſtract and metaphyſical nature.

But it is not the worſt of theſe ſpeculations, that they are generally diſagreeable, and always uſeleſs; theſe kind of ſubtilties in morals have ſometimes had a yet more unhappy effect; and have led thoſe who have been fondeſt of them, even to deny or queſtion the reality of all moral obligations; and they have refined on the theory of morals, till they have deſtroyed or greatly weakened all the motives to the practice of virtue.

And indeed it cannot be denied, this cold, unedifying manner of conſidering a ſubject, that is deſigned to excite the warmeſt approbation, to ingage the moſt ſteady affection, and to employ all the active powers of our nature, is very likely to hurt, inſtead of improving our moral capacities. And, when that noble ardour of mind, which virtue ſhould raiſe, is thus extinguiſhed; it cannot be ſo much wondered at, if it is ſucceeded by indifference about it, or even by a ſecret ſuſpicion of its reality.

But there are other ways of conſidering this great and intereſting ſubject, to which it is the buſineſs of true ſcience to direct us. The profound ſpeculations

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of ſchoolmen may perhaps have this uſe, to teach us a more preciſe and determined expreſſion; and, when they have rendered us this ſervice, we have nothing further to expect from all their pompous labours. In ſome inſtances indeed they have brought us under a kind of neceſſity of treating the ſubject in a manner ſimilar to their own. It is frequently convenient, before we proceed to eſtabliſh the truth, to confute ſuch falſe opinions as appear inconſiſtent with it; and where theſe have long been upheld by the aid of metaphyſical reaſonings, the beſt and moſt effectual method of confutation may be by the uſe of the ſame method of reaſoning; but when the former edifice is thus taken down, and the rubbiſh removed, we ſhall raiſe the goodly building with other materials, and in a far different manner.

It is in the heart and life of man, that we ſhall beſt diſcover what we would know on the ſubject of morals; and our acquaintance, with this part of nature as with every other, will be beſt improved by experience and obſervation. Whether virtue hath its foundation in the underſtanding, or in an implanted ſenſe, as it is a queſtion of inferior conſequence, ſo it ſeems quite foreign to my preſent deſign. The firſt principles of it are certainly to be ſought in human nature; and the knowledge of its obligations muſt be acquired by a ſtrict attention to what the author of our nature has wrote on the table of our hearts.

Our firſt knowledge of the principles and affections of the human heart is drawn from experience; but it is not ſo ſafe perhaps to truſt intirely to our own conſciouſneſs: we muſt look abroad into the world, in order to diſcover the ſentiments and affections of others: and as there is danger of being miſled by con-

confining our views to the manners of a particular age or place, it is neceſſary to take a larger view; and, by the ſtudy of hiſtory, to ſupply the narrowneſs of our own particular and perſonal obſervation.

In converſing with the ſcenes, which hiſtory preſents us with, we have juſt and ſtriking pictures of the ſeveral virtues and vices: they raiſe our moſt natural ſentiments: the generous principles of the human mind have full room to exert themſelves: and our praiſe and cenſure follow thoſe actions, to which they reſpectively belong. This is inſtructing in virtue in the trueſt and beſt ſenſe; it turns our attention to what is moſt juſt and worthy; and at the ſame time confirms us in the love of it. Fiction is not without its uſe; but true hiſtory more eſpecially is attended with this advantage. The writers of fiction are very apt to repreſent mankind according to their own notions: the characters, as well as the events, are often the work of the imagination alone: and they are invented rather to ſerve ſome particular purpoſe, or to ſupport ſome odd opinion, than to lead us to the knowledge of the human heart. But the wiſe grave hiſtorian, who really intends to inſtruct us in what is paſt, will be the moſt likely to draw from the life, and to delineate the actions and characters of men according to their true nature.

And who can pretend to deny the advantage of ſuch ſtudies? whilſt the philoſopher coldly inſtructs, if he does indeed inſtruct us, in the nature of good and evil, and the obligations of virtue: in the delightful pages of a juſt hiſtory, we meet with that, which warms and elevates the mind, and diſpoſes to an honourable and worthy conduct.

The great merit of this kind of knowledge conſiſts in its extenſive uſe and application. It contains the

the duties of a man and a citizen, and all the important offices of peace and war. By this ſtates are formed and governed; and all the rights of governors and ſubjects properly adjuſted.

FROM this entertaining and excellent ſtudy, we proceed by an eaſy gradation to what is in a more peculiar ſenſe Divine and Religious. And "it would "be well for us" ſays a noble writer "if before we "aſcended into the higher regions of divinity, we "would vouchſafe to deſcend a little into ourſelves, "and beſtow ſome poor thoughts on plain honeſt "morals." Our minds, when tinctured with juſt notions of good and evil, and filled with a true ſenſe of what is moſt excellent and lovely in human nature, will proceed to the contemplation of the firſt great Cauſe well prepared to conceive of his inflexible truth, impartial juſtice, and everlaſting mercy; or, to expreſs them all in one, his perfect goodneſs. We ſhall ſee on better evidence, that his commandments are holy, juſt and good; that his adminiſtration is moſt righteous; and that the greateſt good of the whole is the end of all his appointments.

THE laſt and higheſt improvement of the mind in the preſent ſtate may be expected from the ſtudy of the holy ſcriptures: and as the advantage of true ſcience in other reſpects have been conſidered already: it will be expected with the higheſt reaſon, that I conſider a little the aſſiſtance it will afford us here.

AND in the firſt place, there are none, who may not ſee the greateſt uſe of a critical knowledge in the languages, in which they are wrote: without this they could never have been tranſlated at all; and now, that we have them in our own tongue, it is ſtill highly convenient to trace up the ſtreams to the fountain from which they ſpring, that we may be convinced

vinced of their integrity and judgment, who have undertaken and executed this laborious taſk; or that we may diſcover and correct their errors.

As to the ſtudy of nature in the viſible works of creation, tho' it may not appear to have any immediate connexion with the knowledge of the ſcriptures; yet as far as it tends to give us juſter ſentiments of the divine perfections and character, it plainly appears ſubſervient to the intereſts of natural, and conſequently of revealed religion. And beſides the ſacred writers ſo conſtantly refer us to this ſource of divine knowledge, that they ſeem to conſider an acquaintance with the book of nature, as at leaſt a deſirable qualification in thoſe, who come to the ſtudy of divine revelation: and it is certain ſuch as have never given much attention to the inſtances of a wiſe contrivance, and the effects of paternal goodneſs in the works of creation; as their notions of DEITY will be leſs clear, diſtinct and ſtrong: ſo neither will they enter ſo well into the meaning of thoſe texts of ſcripture, in which the knowledge of the inviſible things of GOD is ſaid to be declared or manifeſted by his viſible works. Once more, as the ſcriptures are full of the natural as well as civil hiſtory of the age and country, in which they were wrote; with this preparatory knowledge we ſhall be better fitted to read them with underſtanding: and if we find their deſcriptions of the face of nature, and the ſeveral objects which it preſents, to be juſt and accurate; it will increaſe the other evidence we have of the authenticity of the ſacred books; and prepare us to give a more intire aſſent to the truth of the whole revelation.

BUT nothing will be ſo juſt a preparative for ſcripture learning, as the ſtudy of human nature, and that rich variety of moral and divine knowledge, which is

connected with it. This furniture of the mind will give us large and comprehenſive views of the deſign of revelation, and effectually ſecure us from the danger of perverting it to the purpoſes of tyranny and ſuperſtition. As it is ſuppoſed to come from God, we ſhall eaſily conclude, that the ends and purpoſes of it muſt be agreeable to his eſſential perfections; and as it is intended for the uſe of man, that it is fitted to improve and perfect the higheſt powers of the human mind: and this will naturally direct our thoughts to affairs of greater moment, than any minute trifling criticiſms on particular parts; and lead us to conſider its general grand tendency, and the excellent means it employs to attain it.

I HAVE thus been attempting to ſhew, that the improvements of learning are not only innocent but uſeful; and that they have a nearer or more remote connexion with what is moſt important and valuable in human life.

THEY have their uſe in all kinds of ſocieties, whether civil or religious; and tho' the latter more eſpecially have ſometimes dreaded unhappy effects from a ſpirit of literature, and from the advancement of learning; the wiſe and conſiſtent friends of religion have judged very differently. The deſign of Pope GREGORY I. to deſtroy the valuable remains of heathen learning was generally condemned even by holy men. Or if the friends of religion were ſo weak as to imagine that human learning would be any prejudice to their cauſe; its enemies knew better; and one of the wiſeſt of them, the Emperor JULIAN plainly diſcovered his ſentiments of the advantage Chriſtianity might receive from the learning and knowledge of thoſe who profeſſed it, when he prohibited them either to teach or learn the ſciences. This he plainly appears

appears to have thought a more powerful engine to beat down the ſtrength and influence of the Chriſtians, and to demoliſh their cauſe, than the more cruel and ſanguinary methods of his predeceſſors. This ſpecies of perſecution has ſince been copied by chriſtians againſt each other in more nations than one: the hiſtorian AM. MARCELLINUS tho' an heathen and a great admirer of the Emperor JULIAN, reckoned it inconſiſtent with all juſtice and humanity: it is only mentioned here to ſhow the opinion men have generally had of the advantages of learning; and of the prejudice every cauſe would receive from its neglect and diſuſe.

LET it be allowed, that learning is not of abſolute neceſſity, to ſuch a competent knowledge of the duties of religion, and the offices of virtue, as will make a man a very worthy and uſeful member of ſociety. We depend not on inſtruction for the knowledge of right and wrong; and the chief inſtances of duty and obedience bring with them ſuch a recommendation from GOD himſelf, who has adapted the powers and principles of the human mind to his moſt holy laws, that it is generally impoſſible we ſhould be ignorant of them, or of the obligations they bring us under. And in matters of ſcience the efforts of a great genius, who has none of the aids of learning; and draws from his own ſtock, rather than the writings of others, will have ſomething more great and noble, than the exacter productions of ſcholars with all the aids, which reading and learning can ſupply. But it is eaſy to obſerve, that the natural diſpoſitions to virtue may be improved by good rules; and the way to true wiſdom made plainer and eaſier by the miniſtry of inſtruction. It is juſtly obſerved by CICERO, that there have been many who have riſen to an high pitch of excell-

excellence without learning, and by a kind of divine habit in their natures have approved themſelves juſt and wiſe. I add this too, ſays he, that nature oftener attains glory and excellence without learning, than learning without nature: but, when to an excellent and noble nature, there is added the method and diſcipline of inſtruction; then will the mind exert all its latent powers, and riſe to a ſingular perfection and excellence.

It is very agreeable to conſider the illuſtration, which the foregoing theory will receive from the hiſtory of mankind. The uſefulneſs of learning and knowledge appears from the happy condition of the ſtates, by which they have been cultivated, and from the many evils, which have grown up when the ſciences have been deſpiſed or neglected. And this is a ſubject, which tho' it has not been intirely overlooked, yet ſeems to deſerve the more particular conſideration of ſuch, as are capable of doing juſtice to it.

Tho' I cannot propoſe to myſelf ſo large a deſign; it may be worth our while juſt to reflect on the ſtate of things, in thoſe times, when ignorance ſo univerſally prevailed, and the very records and monuments of paſt improvements were involved in one common ruin; and on the changes, which took place, when the intereſts of learning began once more to be attended to. It is not ſo eaſy perhaps to aſſign the cauſes of that ignorance, which overſpread ſo many parts of Europe; and even thoſe countries, which had been diſtinguiſhed by the encouragement they gave to the purſuits of learning. It has often been imputed to the incurſions of the northern nations; and it may be eaſily believed, that their condition and manner of life were not very favourable to literary improvements; the wars they occaſioned, in the countries

tries into which they entered, would be apt to give a new turn to the thoughts and inclinations of their inhabitants; and tho' their enemies may have exceeded in their accounts of their fierceneſs and cruelty, yet it will be allowed, I ſuppoſe thro' ignorance or malice, they frequently deſtroyed the remains of ancient learning. But ſtill there were other cauſes of this vaſt change, which had their effect, tho' they operated in a more gradual and ſilent manner. The trifling controverſies, which had infeſted the chriſtian world; the zeal, with which they had been carried on; and the abſurd opinions, which had been frequently eſtabliſhed by great and venerable councils, had greatly injured the cauſe of true learning, as well as of real chriſtianity: and thro' the vanity, preſumption and uncharitableneſs of thoſe, who had profeſſed to teach, the people were but too well prepared for a ſtate of great and general ignorance. But whatever the cauſes of it might be, the effect it had on the valuable intereſts of mankind were ſuch as muſt reflect the greateſt honour on the ſciences. It was in theſe dark and ignorant ages that thoſe opinions were received, and thoſe cuſtoms eſtabliſhed, which are the greateſt diſgrace to human nature; and the fruitful cauſes of confuſion and miſery in ſociety. And as to religion, this was the time, when the grand corruption of chriſtianity, which began to work ſo early, grew ſo prodigiouſly as to infect all its parts; and when the chief of thoſe malignant diſorders, which have ſince threatned its very vitals, begun or greatly increaſed. It was in this age, that chains were forged, with which to bind the underſtandings and conſciences of men; and the chief abſurdities and impieties, with which the chriſtian world has been ſince burdened, received their eſtabliſhment.

THESE

THESE were the unhappy effects of ignorance and barbarity; and when in the courſe of human affairs the intereſts of learning were again attended to, there were proportionable improvments in civil and ſocial life. The arts grew in repute; the fierce natures of men were ſoftened and refined; and juſt and regular forms of government, and the due adminiſtration of publick juſtice ſucceeded to the former diſorder and confuſion.

BUT it was in religion, that the happy effects of the revival of learning were moſt obſervable. Mankind, tho' long accuſtomed to the abſurdities and follies of ignorance and darkneſs, when light broke in upon them, began to ſee how groſsly they had been impoſed upon; and to feel the weight of thoſe chains, with which they had been bound. The ſweets of knowledge made them deſirous to extend it; and the ſpirit of free inquiry which was incouraged on other ſubjects, inclined them to examine what they had been taught in religion; and to ſearch for the original and foundation of received practices. The iſſue of this has been ſuch a reformation in the chriſtian world, as muſt do honour to the age, in which it was begun; and will do honour to every age, which ſhall have the reſolution and integrity to continue and perfect it.

HOW greatly the revival of learning has contributed to bring about this happy event is abundantly evident. In our own country in particular, our improvements in learning, and the reformation in religion, as well as the other valuable bleſſings of ſocial life appear to have advanced with equal ſteps. The compariſon of our own with other countries is extremely difficult to be executed with any degree of impartiality; but we need not be afraid of ſaying, that this nation has at leaſt had its ſhare of great and learned men,

men; and been diſtinguiſhed by a more general application to the ſciences than many others. And is there any nation, where the arts, which ſerve to the uſe and ornament of human life have been purſued with more ſucceſs? do not our excellent form of government, the ſecurity of publick liberty, and the regular adminiſtration of juſtice, and all the bleſſings of domeſtic and private life, with which we are favoured, bear a moſt clear teſtimony to the advantages, which learning and knowledge bring? and above all the happy progreſs which the reformation has made; the care and diligence with which the ſcriptures have been ſtudied; the honour, which chriſtianity has received from the candid and juſt repreſentations, which have been given of its deſign; and the juſt foundations on which the authority of it have been placed, are certain proofs that true ſcience at leaſt has a moſt favourable aſpect on its intereſts; and that the injuries it receives in an ignorant and barbarous age are effectually redreſſed by the increaſe of real knowledge.

But whatever may have been done already to promote uſeful knowledge in theſe nations, and to gain the many great and noble bleſſings, which are connected with it; there is ſtill room for our labours, if we can do any thing, which may be the means of inlarging our acquiſitions; or at leaſt of preſerving thoſe, which have been already made.

This is a point, which deſerves the particular attention of chriſtian miniſters. There have been times, in which many of this order have found it their intereſt to keep the people in ignorance and diſcourage inquiry. Their doctrines would not bare to be examined; their chief emoluments aroſe from the credulity, ignorance and ſuperſtition of their followers; and

and their curious fabric was ſure to fall, as ſoon as the foundations, on which it reſted, ſhould be diſcovered. This mean and intereſted policy in thoſe, who paſs for inſtructors, is juſtly condemned at all times: it ſhows a poor, narrow ſpirit to oppoſe the advancement of learning upon any ſuch conſiderations. But it is often as politic, as it is juſt and fit in itſelf to eſpouſe the cauſe of learning, and to liſt ourſelves in the number of its declared friends.

It ſeems peculiarly neceſſary in the preſent age, in which a regard to learning, and a deſire, to make ſome proficiency in it, is become ſo univerſal, that the miniſters of the chriſtian religion ſhould be diſtinguiſhed by that kind of learning at leaſt, which more immediately relates to the miniſterial office. And here what ſhall I ſay? that it will be a means of extending our credit and influence with our people; of removing or leſſening the prejudices of our enemies; and promoting the honour of that particular denomination by which we are diſtinguiſhed; I will ſay what is much more, that it will conduce to our becoming the wiſe, conſiſtent advocates of truth and virtue, and the friends of mankind. In a word, next to integrity of heart and purity of manners, I can hardly think of a more deſirable accompliſhment in a chriſtian miniſter, than a good and well improved underſtanding.

Our yearly meetings afford us a good opportunity of conſidering the beſt means of promoting good learning and true religion; and if they are at any time paſt over without any ſerious attempts for this purpoſe, one great end of them appears to be defeated: the moſt effectual way of attaining this end, I ſhall leave to the conſideration of thoſe of a longer ſtanding in the miniſtry.

We

We need the concurrence of all orders in a deſign of ſuch importance; and it will not be judged improper to recommend it to all, who are hearty in the intereſts of religion and virtue, to apply their thoughts to this ſubject; and ſhow themſelves the friends of knowledge and inquiry.

If you, our hearers, diſcover a generous freedom in controverted points; if you are willing to give up ancient errors; if you encourage all juſt attempts to remove from chriſtianity every corrupt addition; and to clear it of thoſe incumbrances, which ſo viſibly obſtruct its progreſs and influence; you will ſtrengthen the hands of your miniſters, and encourage them to ſeek with more diligence and chearfulneſs all the improvements of ſound, uſeful learning; and to lay before you from time to time the reſult of their impartial inquiries.

To conclude, the beſt way of ſhowing yourſelves the friends of learning will be by a generous attention to the liberal education of youth. It is from the accompliſhments and character of the younger part, that we are to expect under God to enlarge or even to preſerve the ſtock of knowledge, which is put into our hands. If we neglect the culture and improvement of young minds; if we ſuffer their capacities to be ruined by idleneſs, or to be diſſipated by pleaſure; if we only train them up in the arts of gain, without any care to inſtruct them in good learning, and poſſeſs their minds with uſeful knowledge; the next age will of courſe degenerate from the preſent; and unleſs the providence of God interpoſe, we ſhall ſink again into that ſtate of ignorance and barbarity, from which we have happily emerged. But if we bring them up in an early attention to real, valuable knowledge; and happily ſucceed in our endeavours to en-

rich their minds with this noble furniture, the proſpect is fair and inviting: we may reaſonably hope, that our preſent bleſſings will be continued and increaſed, that commerce will flouriſh, that public liberty will be eſtabliſhed on an immoveable foundation; that chriſtianity will attain its deſerved honours, and gradually extend its influence, till it becomes the joy of the whole earth.

THERE are few here, who need to be informed of a deſign lately entered upon in this neighbourhood for the liberal education of youth, and of the incouragement it has met with. That the accompliſhment of all the purpoſes of ſuch an inſtitution is not to be expected in the beginning is readily acknowledged; and it is hardly to be expected that every thing which may be deſired and deſigned will immediately be put into execution. The efforts of an infant ſociety, which has the beſt ſupports, will of courſe be feeble; and there muſt be time allowed, before we can expect it to attain its full ſtrength and maturity. It is ſome ſatisfaction however to think, that a fair attempt is made to ſerve the cauſe of human and ſacred learning, to train up youth for the chriſtian miniſtry, and for the other important offices of life. It is ſome ſatisfaction that ſo conſiderable a progreſs has already been made in it; and it will be a worthy object of the united efforts of all good men to ſecure the honour and ſucceſs of ſuch an inſtitution.

SHALL I ſay it will do honour to Diſſenters, and be a means of ſtrengthening their cauſe, to ingage with united counſels in a ſcheme which is deſigned, not to ſerve a particular party, not to promote any peculiar and diſtinguiſhing notions; but to propagate ſound learning, to extend real, uſeful knowledge, and to lead to the ſecurity of all our private and publick

lick bleſſings? It will be your greateſt honour, and a probable means of ſtrengthening your intereſt, and increaſing your influence in ſociety. But I would not willingly ſuppoſe, that theſe will be the moſt prevailing motives with you; there are other and greater, which may be fitly uſed on this occaſion; and I will venture to recommend it to your attention for its own ſake, as deſigned to ſerve the general intereſts of mankind; and to promote truth, virtue and happineſs.

THESE are the great and animating motives, which ſhould ingage our hearty concurrence in every juſt ſcheme for the liberal education of youth. And let it not diſcourage any, that the ſucceſs is doubtful, that the difficulties with which the execution of it will be attended, are obvious and ſure, but the means by which they are to be overcome more remote and uncertain. Something may be done, the united counſels, and efforts of numbers will have proportionable effects; and, it is not to ſay, what vigour and reſolution under the direction of prudence may be able to accompliſh.

OF this however we may be aſſured, that thoſe who are ſincere in their endeavours to ſerve the cauſe of ſound learning and uſeful knowledge, by concurring in the ſcheme refered to above, or ingaging in any other, which they ſhall think more likely to attain theſe ends; in whatever way it ſhall operate, will have the ſatisfaction of deſigning well, and will deſerve the eſteem and thanks of all good men.

PERMIT me juſt to add my unfeigned wiſh, that nothing may ever appear in thoſe, who have the ornament of a good and well-improved underſtanding, which may faſten a diſgrace, or occaſion any unworthy reflexions on the cauſe of learning. But to the

other

other endowments of the mind, may there always be added the good diſpoſitions of the heart; and the progreſs we make in knowledge ſerve to eſtabliſh us in the love of virtue, and the practice of true piety; and ſo conduce to our preſent honour and comfort, and our everlaſting happineſs.

*FINIS.*